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Structure/Function Studies of Atropine: Cucurbituril Complexes

Raymond Glassenberg, M.D.¹, Michael Avram, Ph.D.¹, Arabela A. Grigorescu, Ph.D.², and Pamela J. Focia, Ph.D.³

¹Department of Anesthesiology, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL 60611

²Department of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology and Cell Biology, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL 60611

³Department of Molecular Pharmacology and Biological Chemistry, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL 60611

Introduction: There are over one million accidental exposures to organophosphate insecticides annually. Weaponized organophosphates (sarin) released in a Tokyo subway caused many casualties. The antidote, atropine, is difficult to titrate and overdose leads to an anticholinergic toxidrome. We are investigating whether excess atropine can be chelated with a readily available macrocycle to help control its side effects.

Methods: The binding constant of atropine to cucurbit[7]uril (CB7) was measured using isothermal titration calorimetry. Crystallization of the complex was achieved by controlled evaporation and x-ray diffraction data were measured at the Advanced Photon Source, Life Sciences Collaborative Access Team (LS-CAT) beamline 21-ID-D. The crystals are orthorhombic and diffract to 0.97-Å resolution.

Results: The binding constant of atropine to CB7 was determined to have a $K_a=170,000 \text{ M}^{-1}$. The crystal structure reveals that the portal carbonyls of the cucurbituril interact with the nitrogen of the atropine tropane ring.

Significance: These studies will help design new drug antidotes. In the interest of homeland security, anesthesiologists and other first responders will have additional tools in their armamentarium to reverse the effects of weaponized chemicals.